

# UTICA OBSERVER-DISPATCH

## OPINION

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### **We must learn how to conserve**

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It's a shame that it takes a law to force energy conservation. But that seems to be the way in America, where we take one-time luxuries for granted and don't react until there's a crisis. Even then, we need prodding.

Maybe we should listen this time.

The latest poke comes in the form of proposed legislation that would force automakers to build vehicles that get better gas mileage. The legislation, proposed by Rep. Sherwood Boehlert, R-New Hartford, would raise mileage standards from the current average of 25 miles per gallon to 33 mpg by 2016. He figures that could end up saving us 2.6 million barrels of oil a day by 2025.

That seems a long way off, but it's a lot closer than 1973. Many drivers on the road today weren't around then, but those who were certainly remember the long lines at filling stations, no Sunday gasoline sales and the odd-even days of gasoline rationing.

The forced conservation was the result of an oil embargo against the United States by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. The group of Arab states turned off the valves in October following recurring Mideast tension, and as a result, fuel became scarce and prices shot up. President Richard Nixon urged America to conserve by turning down thermostats, car pooling and driving less. Daylight Savings Time was even extended to keep the lights off longer.

Sound familiar?

Boehlert is concerned that some folks might look at this legislation and not see how it can make a difference in their lives now. Here's how it can: After OPEC lifted the embargo in March 1974, America pretty much resumed its old ways and quickly forgot about the oil crisis. We can only imagine where we might be today had we demanded vehicles with better mileage and stuck with energy conservation measures then.

Boehlert's legislation needs serious consideration. In the meantime, we should follow the common-sense suggestion of President Bush, who on Monday urged Americans to cut back on unnecessary travel to make up for fuel shortages in the wake of recent hurricanes.

It's a habit we should get into regardless of shortages. As Boehlert said, if oil suppliers see America is serious about energy conservation and saving, then future demand will be lessened. "And when demand goes down, the price goes down."

It's a lesson worth learning.